

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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R 042044Z FEB 74

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6228

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

CINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 0490

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, HO

SUBJ: NATIONALIST PARTY CONVENTION

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 370

BEGIN SUMMARY: FEBRUARY 2 NATIONALIST PARTY CONVENTION
CONFIRMED RICARDO ZUNIGA AUGUSTINUS AS PARTY BOSS. THE
CONVENTION ELECTED THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE PREVIOUSLY
SELECTED BY ZUNIGA AND PRAISED HIM AS THE "UNDISPUTED"
LEADER. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFFS, ZUNIGA STATED THAT
HE HAD PLAN TO STEADILY INCREASE PRESSURE AGAINST
GOVERNMENT FOR A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY. END SUMMARY.

1. THE NATIONALIST PARTY HELD ITS CONVENTION ON FEBRUARY
2. IT HAD ORIGINALLY BEEN SCHEDULED FOR FEBRUARY 1-5
BUT ALL ITEMS OF BUSINESS WERE COMPLETED IN A LONG ONE
DAY SESSION. 64 DELEGATES FROM THE 18 DEPARTMENTS
ATTENDED.

2. PREVIOUS SPECULATION ABOUT POSSIBLE OPPOSITION TO
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RICARDO ZUNIGA AUGUSTINUS, LONGTIME PARTY BOSS, DID NOT

DEVELOP. ZUNIGA EASILY CONTROLLED THE CONVENTION AND IT PLAYED ITS ALLOTTED ROLE WITHOUT DEVIATING FROM THE SCRIPT. THE CONVENTION CONSMRMED ZUNIGA IN HIS ROLE AS GENERAL COORDINATOR OF THE PARTY AND AUTHORIZED THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE TO EXERT ALL EFFORTS TO REACH AN AGREEMENT WITH OTHER ELEMENTS OF SOCIETY CONCERNING HOW TO RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT.

3. ZUNIGA'S CHOICES FOR THE NEW CENTRAL COMMITTEE WERE ALSO ELECTED UNANIMOUSLY. IT IS APPARENT THAT THE NEW COMMITTEE WILL BE NOTHING MORE THAN ITS PREDECESSORS, THAT IS, A SOUNDING BOARD AND EXECUTOR OF ZUNIGA'S POLICIES. THE FOLLOWING IS A LIST OF THE MEMBERSHIP:

- (A) PRESIDENT, RAHEEL BARDALES BUESO, FORMER MINED IN RROPEZ' 1965-1971 GOVERNMENT;
- (B) NICOLAS CRUZ TORRES, SECRETARY OF DISSOLVED NATIONAL CONGRESS, UNDER SECRETARY OF LABOR IN PRESIDENT CRUZ' 1971-1972 GOVERNMENT;
- (C) VICTOR CACERES LARA, VICE PRESIDENT OF NATIONAL CONGRESS, AMBASSADOR TO VENEZUELA;
- (D) ABEL VILLACORTA CISNEROS;
- (E) IRMA ACOSTA DE FORTIN; MEMBER OF CONGRESS;
- (F) MARTIN PEREZ M., PRESIDENT OF NATIONAL COUNCIL OF ELECTION IN 1968;
- (G) LUCAS ZELAYA LOZANO;
- (H) ROBERTO E. CANTERO, MINISTER OF COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPORT IN 1971-72 GOVERNMENT;
- (I) RENE SAGASTUME CASTILLO, MEMBER OF CONGRESS IN 1965-71 GOVERNMENT;
- (J) RENATO BENDANA;
- (K) MARIO G. DURON B.;
- (L) MARIO COLINDRES;
- (M) ARMANDO DIAZ ARRIVILLAGA (ALTERNATE), FORMER HEAD OF WATER AND SEWAGE AGENCY;
- (N) LUCILA DE ORTIZ RIVERA (ALTERNATE) AND
- (O) EDGARDO PINEDA PASCUA (ALTERNATE).

4. DURING THE CONVENTION EMBOFF ENCOUNTERED ZUNIGA AND TALKED TO HIM ABOUT HIS FUTURE PLANS.HE SAID THAT IT IS CONFIDENTIAL

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DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN PARTY DISCIPLINE IN THE FACE OF SLIM FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND THE NATURE OF THE PRESENT DE FACTO REGIME. ZUNIGA STATED THAT IT IS IN THE INTERESTS OF THE PRESENT MILITARY REGIME TO MAINTAIN THE STATE OF TENSION WITH EL SALVADOR BECAUSE IT JUSTIFIES A DE FACTO GOVERNMENT AND EMPHASIZED THAT ONLY A REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT WOULD BE ABLE TO RESOLVE THE QUESTION. HE POINTED OUT THAT ONE OF THE MAIN ISSUES THAT WOULD HAVE TO BE RESOLVED IS THE

RPBOELM OF SALVADORAN IMMIGRATION INTO HONDURAS. HE ALSO COMMENTED THAT A RENEWAL OF THE WAR WAS A POSSIBILITY BUT ADDED THAT THE USG HAS BEEN INTERVENING IN THE MATTER BY LIMITING ARMS SALES TO EACH COUNTRY, THEREBY LIMITING THEIR POWER TO WAGE WAR. HE SAID THAT THE PARTY WILL EMBARK ON A NEW ACTION PROGRAM IN ORDER TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE REGIME FOR A RETURN TO A CONSTITUTIONAL REGIME. HE SAID HE HOPES TO KEEP THE PARTY'S ACTIVITIES JUST BELOW THE LEVEL THAT WOULD PROVOKE REPRISALS FROM THE GOVERNMENT BUT THAT IF THERE IS REPRESSION IT WOULD ADD FUEL TO THE DEMAND FOR A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY. ZUNIGA SAID THAT LOPEZ' RECENT STATEMENT IN COSTA RICA CONCERNING THE POSSIBILITY OF ELECTION IN 1976 MAY MEAN THAT LOPEZ IS THINKING OF LEGITIMIZING HIMSELF AS HE DID IN 1965; HOWEVER, ZUNIGA SAID HE WOULD OPPOSE GIVING HIM NATIONALIST PARTY BACKING FOR SUCH A MANEUVER.

5. COMMENT: ZUNIGA LOOKED DAPPER AND IN GOOD HEALTH DURING THE CONVENTION AND GAVE THE IMPRESSION OF BEING IN FULL COMMAND OF THE PARTY. HE ADMITS THAT HIS TASK IN PRESSURING LOPEZ FOR A RETURN TO FULL PARTY ACTIVITY IS FORMIDABLE, BUT SEES NO FEASIBLE ALTERNATIVE. THERE IS LITTLE QUESTION THAT HE IS WELL AWARE OF THE DANGER TO THE PARTY'S INTERNAL ORGANIZATION AND HOLD ON POPULAR SENTIMENT IF THE PARTY APPEARS TO BE LANGUISHING. HIS PLANS FOR THE FUTURE ARE OBVIOUSLY SOMEWHAT VAGUE BECAUSE HE IS UNSURE HOW POSSIBLE SOURCES OF OPPOSITION TO THE REGIME WILL EVENTUALLY DEVELOP, FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR. HOWEVER, HE IS EXTREMELY ABLE AT PICKING OPPORTUNITIES THAT WOULD GIVE HIM LEVERAGE AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT AND PROBABLY LOOKS UPON AGRARIAN REFORM AND THE SALVADOR QUESTION AS TWO SUCH AREAS. IN ADDITION, THE LIBERALS WILL HOLD THEIR CONVENTION ON APRIL 1 WHICH WILL BE A TEST OF STRENGTH
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BETWEEN CARLOS ROBERTO REINA AND MODESTO RODAS ALVARADO. ZUNIGA BELIEVES REINA WILL WIN AND THEREBY BE THE GENERALLY ACKNOWLEDGED LIBERAL LEADER. UNDOUBTEDLY, HE WILL ATTEMPT TO COME TO SOME TACTICAL AGREEMENT WITH REINA THAT WILL PERMIT THEM TO FORM A RELATIVELY UNITED FRONT TO THE GOVERNMENT. ZUNIGA HAS ALREADY HAD A SERIES OF CONVERSATIONS WITH REINA ON THIS POINT.
SANCHEZ

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